



Office of the Board of Regents

TO: Board of Regents
FROM: Dallas R. Evans, Chairman
DATE: January 10, 2013
RE: Renewal of David Wilson's Contract

CONFIDENTIAL

The December 4th decision of the Morgan State University Board of Regents to not renew the contract of Dr. David Wilson as president; its subsequent action on December 28th, and my casting the lone vote against the reversal have generated many questions about the wisdom of the Board's original position and the reasons for the change of heart.

Let me say at the outset that the December 4th decision was reached after two years of careful consideration of the current status of the University and its strategic direction for the future; and I am convinced that decision was correct. The Board reversed itself only after three weeks of the dissemination of inaccurate information and aggressive lobbying.

Since the issue of non-renewal is a personnel matter, the Board has not attempted to respond publicly on the substance of this matter except to indicate that the December 4th decision was made in accordance with the terms and conditions of Dr. Wilson's contract.

The notice provision of the contract is rather standard in an employment agreement for college presidents and it allows the parties to simply end the contract as agreed when the contract was formed. The Board is oftentimes constrained from providing the level of detail many constituents wish in determining the reasonableness of a particular action taken by the Board. That is at the core of our current dilemma.

Finally for the sake of presenting a united front, the Board sought to make its December 28th decision unanimous and while I have respect for my fellow Board members, I could not in good conscience vote for the change. Knowing what I know, agreeing to the new arrangement would be in my judgment, a betrayal of the students, faculty and staff, alumni and other constituents whose trust we are sworn to uphold. Our students in particular deserve better and as matter of principle I will never knowingly betray their trust.

Attached is my confidential report to the Board on observations and views related to Dr. Wilson's tenure at Morgan.

Confidential Summary of Observations and Opinions Shared With the Morgan State University Board of Regents from July 2010 to December 2012 Regarding the Performance of the President

Submitted by Dallas R. Evans, Chair
January 10, 2013

The Morgan State University Board of Regents announced in early December 2009 the selection of Dr. David Wilson as the new president of the University. Several Regents questioned whether or not an individual with his background could effectively lead the institution at this point in its development. However, the Board voted unanimously to approve his appointment and advised that I work closely with the president-elect to insure a smooth transition in campus leadership. I have since interacted with Dr. Wilson in a variety of settings, always being attentive to his ideas; sometimes applauding his optimism and still other times cautioning him to consult with staff for background or further insight on the particular subject being discussed. In addition, I have observed the President as he interacted with students, faculty, staff, University regents and other stakeholders in many campus and off-campus forums. These experiences have enabled me to learn first-hand a tremendous amount about Dr. Wilson's management style and overall effectiveness. In my opinion, he does not provide the inspiring and insightful leadership the University requires nor has he created a clear and consistent vision for the campus. I do not believe that he has demonstrated a genuine commitment to the university, but instead often seeks to promote himself. I have witnessed his attempts to circumvent various state regulations, federal statutes, and/or university policies and procedures: and he seems to resent staff and other resource persons who advise him on the need for compliance in these matters.

The President has been dismissive towards the Board of Regents, frequently misleading and manipulating the members on issues of considerable consequence. In stark contrast to what the Board envisioned with his appointment, Dr. Wilson has not rallied the University community to higher purpose, greater pride, and improved performance. He has instead generated much confusion, uncertainty and dysfunction within the organization. Since July 2010 there is within the Board significantly more disagreement, distrust and divisiveness than I have experienced during my twenty three years as a Regent. The decorum of the Board has changed from civility and collegiality to acrimony and strife. Some Board members have been, in my judgment, overly aggressive, harsh and even threatening to University staff on whom the Board has historically relied for support. For the first time Board members have demanded that the Student Regent be excluded from executive sessions of the Board. Regents are discussing the extent to which political influence should be a factor in the appointment, promotion, and tenure decisions and most disturbing, the degree to which the Board should be involved in deciding individual cases of appointment, promotion and tenure. Some Regents openly disregard Board policies and protocol. This change in the nature, tone and tenor of the discussion and behavior of the Board, in my view, is a direct reflection of the President's lack of candor and failure to appropriately manage issues in an efficient and effective manner. There is no doubt in my mind that under his leadership the University has been severely compromised on many levels and it is significantly more vulnerable than ever before to legal liability and political embarrassment.

VISION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR THE INSTITUTION

The strategic plan submitted by Dr. Wilson and approved by the Board of Regents provides for the continued development of the institution as a Doctoral Research University. However, in discussions with his staff and the Board chair, the President speaks unfavorably of the university's development of the doctoral programs that serve as the foundation of our current doctoral research designation while instead advocating that the campus consider awarding two-year degrees. He has until recently distanced himself from the School of Business and Management and downplayed its emphasis on the traditional disciplines.

In budget allocations, Dr. Wilson has chosen to fund salary increases and several new positions in administration rather than to allocate additional positions for faculty, who teach our students, write grants, conduct research and do community outreach. These shifting priorities are incompatible with maintaining our present status, not to mention moving to the upper ranks of the doctoral research classification as the President has proposed. These actions create uncertainty and confusion within the University community about the strategic direction of the institution and the future role faculty, students, staff and alumni will have in it. Moreover, it can have a devastating effect on campus morale and esprit de corps; faculty and staff recruitment and retention; and ultimately the image and reputation of the campus.

COMMITMENT TO THE UNIVERSITY

Dr. Wilson entered the search for the Morgan presidency after about three and a half years in his previous position. Two years after assuming the Morgan presidency, the Board learned through the news media that he was a candidate or was being considered, first, for the presidency of The State University of New York at Albany and two months later as the Executive Director of the White House Initiative for Historically Black Institutions. The Board had no prior knowledge of his interests in either of the positions and when asked about the New York position in particular, Dr. Wilson offered conflicting explanations. He appears to have done something similar in the case of the White House Initiative position.

Dr. Wilson has also been quick to remind campus audiences and the general public of his reluctance to come to Morgan and what he interprets to be the difficulty of the Regents in recruiting him to the campus. He emphasizes that his entire career has been with traditionally white institutions. You may recall that he was challenged on this point by one of the Regents during his selection interview with the Board. Except for a few periodic and previously scheduled meetings, he spends much of his time at various off-campus forums promoting what he terms his great success in the short period of two

and a half years. Together, these activities reflect a lack of commitment on the part of Dr. Wilson and raise many questions as to his intentions for the future.

MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Despite well-documented accounts of the University's success in government reports, various media outlets, University records and other professional publications, Dr. Wilson came with a biased concept of the institution and the individuals associated with it. As he describes it, it was "a campus in crisis," suffering from a "talent deficit" (rather than a manpower shortage) and need for a "culture change." His crisis perspective seems to inform his management approach, leading him to shun staff rather than to consult or delegate to them. Decisions are made and positions are taken on a daily basis without being thoroughly vetted for any governing statutes (university, city, state, federal) or other relevant implications. Equally damaging, he frequently has to reverse decisions he has made previously. A typical example is his reversal of an earlier decision to discontinue deferrals for faculty under consideration for tenure and promotion without consulting with the faculty, the deans or the provost on the value of the deferral policy to the institution, students and faculty involved. Regents will recall that the policy was born of a goal of the institution to aggressively recruit and retain quality faculty in the absence of our being able to offer a competitive professional development infrastructure.

The current state of affairs was, in retrospect, predictable. Less than two months after his selection, four months before he actually assumed the presidency, and long before he had an opportunity to make an objective assessment, Dr. Wilson gave indications of his thinking about several members of the university team. It happens that those early indications were precursors to more deliberate efforts to isolate certain staff persons and otherwise encourage their departure from the university. He claimed to have received applications from around the country for their positions. That now appears not to have been the case as he has had difficulty filling several key positions and was left with no alternative but to ask some to stay until replacements were found e.g. vice president for student affairs, dean of business. The targeted group included a mix of vice presidents, deans and management team members. Many of these individuals just happened to have been in some way implicated by Morgan's critics as being associated with the coalition lawsuit: Dean of Business (MBA duplication); Dean of Engineering (electrical engineering); vice president for student affairs (student rallies); provost and vice president for operations (MHEC discussions on duplication); Director of the Robert Bell Center for Civil Rights in Education (legal advice against program duplication) and university general counsel (legal advisor and university liaison for coalition related matters). In one instance, the President went so far as to impugn the character of an employee by opining to several Board members about a sexual harassment incident that occurred 14 years before the President arrived on campus. Some administrators were marginalized through reorganization and/or realignment of duties. Still others are humiliated as the president deliberately gives credit to his favorite staff members for accomplishments of those he disfavors. This approach to management does not inspire confidence in Dr. Wilson's leadership nor does it contribute to effective and efficient teamwork.

BOARD RELATIONS

During Dr. Wilson's initial meeting with the Board Chair in late January 2010, he spoke disparagingly of several members of the Board and mused with disdain about their longevity of service. He was direct and emphatic about his intent to have them replaced sooner rather than later. The attitude reflected in that initial meeting seems to explain in part, his lack of responsiveness to Board advice and guidance, directives and policies, and his continuing attempts to mislead the Board on extremely important matters. Some of the most egregious examples relate to the President's position on the pending Coalition lawsuit, his handling of personnel issues and his response to a request for a report on campus facilities with environmental problems.

From the very beginning, the Board adopted a position of neutrality in the Coalition lawsuit against the Maryland Higher Education Commission as a strategy for navigating the sensitive divide between the interests of the State and the Historically Black Institution community. It would not align itself with the Coalition for fear of offending state officials but it would not risk the outrage and turmoil that would surely result from the University taking a position against the HBI students, faculty and staff and other supporters who constitute the Coalition. The President has never accepted the Board's advice and has insisted on aligning himself with the State, despite warnings from the chair and the management team of the outrage he would create if the campus community ever learned of his actions. As late as October 2012, there was no evidence that the president had changed his position though he testified during the trial on the needs of the University and was present for the final arguments on October 19, 2012.

The example involving the environmental condition of campus buildings is of even greater consequence because of its legal implications. As the result of a complaint brought to the Board by a staff person, the Board requested that the President provide to the Regents any and all documents, reports and other information on November 29, 2012. Information provided was incomplete and in the absence of information requested the Board may be hindered in its examination of issues before it. When information is withheld it can lend to claims of cover-up or can result in increased risks.

Finally, on the issue of the turmoil that has beset the Morgan community over the last four weeks, there is sufficient reason to believe that Dr. Wilson was involved in its orchestration. We know also that much of what he stated in his December 10, 2012, list of accomplishments was misleading.

CONCLUSION

The issues and problems expressed in this document are not new. I have expressed them to the Board or some segment of the Board on numerous occasions and as noted in Board minutes, including Executive Sessions in 2011 and 2012. For the past two years I have been sharing this type of information with members of the executive committee in individual conversations; I advised the President's evaluation committee in 2011 and 2012 and I shared my observations with the full Board in executive sessions on November 6, 2012, December 4, 2012 and December 28, 2012.

While the Board voted on December 4th not renew the President's current contract and reaffirmed that decision in the December 28th meeting, the Regents agreed in the same meeting to negotiate a one-year contract with Dr. Wilson. To the extent the Board's decision can be construed as the Regents being complicit in any wrongdoing the President may be guilty of, I believe the liability for the Regents as a Board and as individuals is greater than ever before. I continue to believe that our decision to offer the President a new one-year contract was a mistake and the current efforts of the President to change the language of the Board's action on December 28, 2012, is a good indicator that I am right.